

The Growth of Cities and Urban Lifestyles in the United States

Urbanization

Between 1870 and 1900, urbanization began.

The population of urban areas more than tripled, from 10 Million in 1870 to over 30 Million at the turn of the Century.

New York City merged with Brooklyn and exploded in population.

- Chicago
- Philadelphia
- Pittsburgh
- Detroit
- St. Louis

Many other cities grew up just as quickly.

Advancements in transportation and communication allowed individuals to live outside the city but commute to work, expanding metropolitan areas.

Brooklyn Bridge and New York Sky Line.



After New York City merged with Brooklyn in the early 1880s, it became the largest city in the United States of America. The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge was crucial to the merger.

Migration to Urban Areas

FARMERS & AGRARIANS

American farmers often made the decision to move to the city out of economic necessity. Due to high debt, inconsistent crop yields, and the growing mechanization of the agriculture, smallholders could no longer compete. Many chose to find jobs in the cities, which allowed them to improve their quality of life.

IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants came to the United States for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was to find economic opportunities which might not exist in their native lands. Although most jobs required hard labor and did not pay well, many immigrants sought to pool their resources, live in squalor for a time, and then purchase land. Others simply sent their earnings to loved ones abroad.

Steel Frames and Skyscrapers

The architect Louis Sullivan was most closely associated with skyscrapers, which could only be built after the use of steel I-beams became widespread. Wooden buildings could rarely stand higher than five or six stories, because the weight of the upper floors could not be supported with a wooden base. Steel was much stronger than wood, and a steel framed building might be built twenty times higher. In major cities, where real estate was expensive, being able to “build up” was key.



The New York City skyline prior to September 11, 2001.

Public Transportation Systems

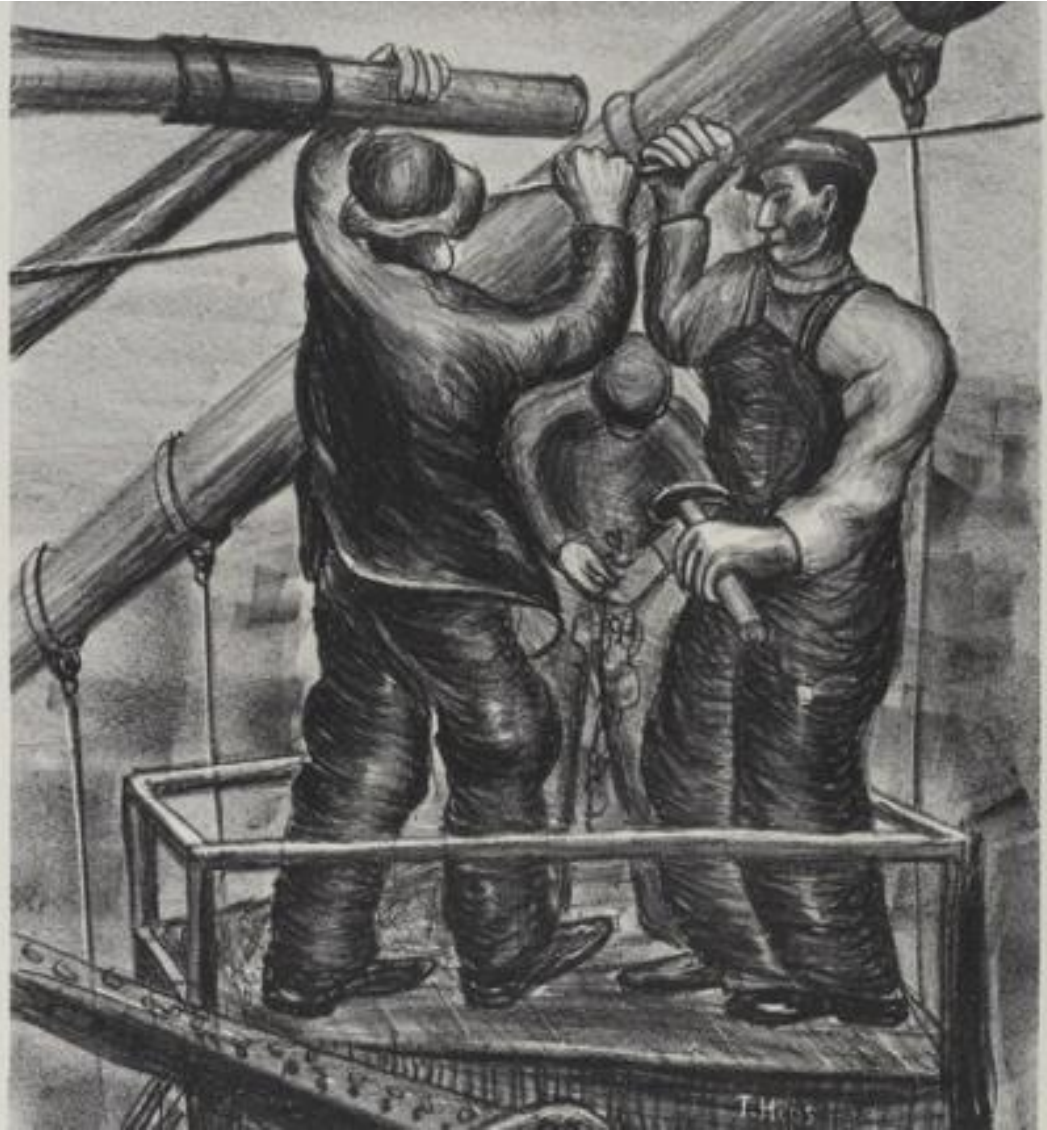


- Cable cars
- Electric trolley cars
- Elevated Railroads
- Subways
- Buses

Little known fact: the first electric trolley cars ever used as public transportation were installed in Richmond, Virginia, in 1887

The Brooklyn Bridge

Using Andrew Carnegie's thick steel cables and all of the nation's finest engineers, the Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883. It was the world's largest suspension bridge when it was completed, and it connected two of the three largest cities in the United States at the time: New York City – think the Manhattan Skyline – and Brooklyn, which was still an independent city at the time. Today, Brooklyn is one borough of New York City, along with the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Staten Island. (Harlem is a neighborhood, not a borough!)



The Safety Elevator – Otis

Elisha Otis was the inventor of the safety elevator – the most important aspect of which was a fail-safe braking system. Skyscrapers, after all, were not a very significant contribution to our nation's quality of life if you had to spend an hour climbing to the top of the building each morning. The elevator made the highest levels of the skyscraper that much more accessible. The invention of the skyscraper was essential to city life by the end of the 1920s.



Elisha Otis demonstrates the elevator brake.

The Emerging Middle Class

Doctors, lawyers, engineers, social workers, managers of firms, architects, and teachers began to distinguish themselves from more common laborers into a slightly more refined middle class. Middle class families dressed with higher quality clothing; middle class women rarely worked out of necessity, and often, middle class families could employ a servant to help out around the house – often for room and board with very little allowance in terms of wages.

- Homeowners
- Middle Management
- Professionals
- Materialistic Consumers
- Employed Servants

Tenements in Urban Slums

Dark and crowded multi-family apartments in major cities were called tenements. Drafty windows, shared access to water and plumbing, and impoverished circumstances characterized almost all tenements. Immigrant families often tried to save money by sharing apartments, and the overpopulation of these living quarters led to the rapid spread of contagious diseases. Due to the overcrowded conditions and poverty, tenements became associated with poverty, crime, and the spread of contagious disease. Inevitably, the victims of these terrible conditions were blamed for the promotion of the ills.



Cramped, overcrowded conditions, shared living spaces, and shared access to bathrooms and running water encouraged the spread of disease in tenements. Poverty led to crime. The living conditions in most urban slums were dangerous.

Jobs for 19th Century Women

Even for middle class white women with college educations, employment opportunities were limited during the 19th Century. The notion that a woman's place was in the home was widespread and discrimination against women in hiring practices was a regular event. Even during periods of national emergency, like World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, it was considered a breach of established gender roles for women to take jobs in the work force. Femininity was tied to subservience and domesticity to a large extent, and women who advocated for greater opportunities were outliers.

- Teaching
- Clerical Work
- Domestic Servants
- Textiles
- Garments
- Tobacco



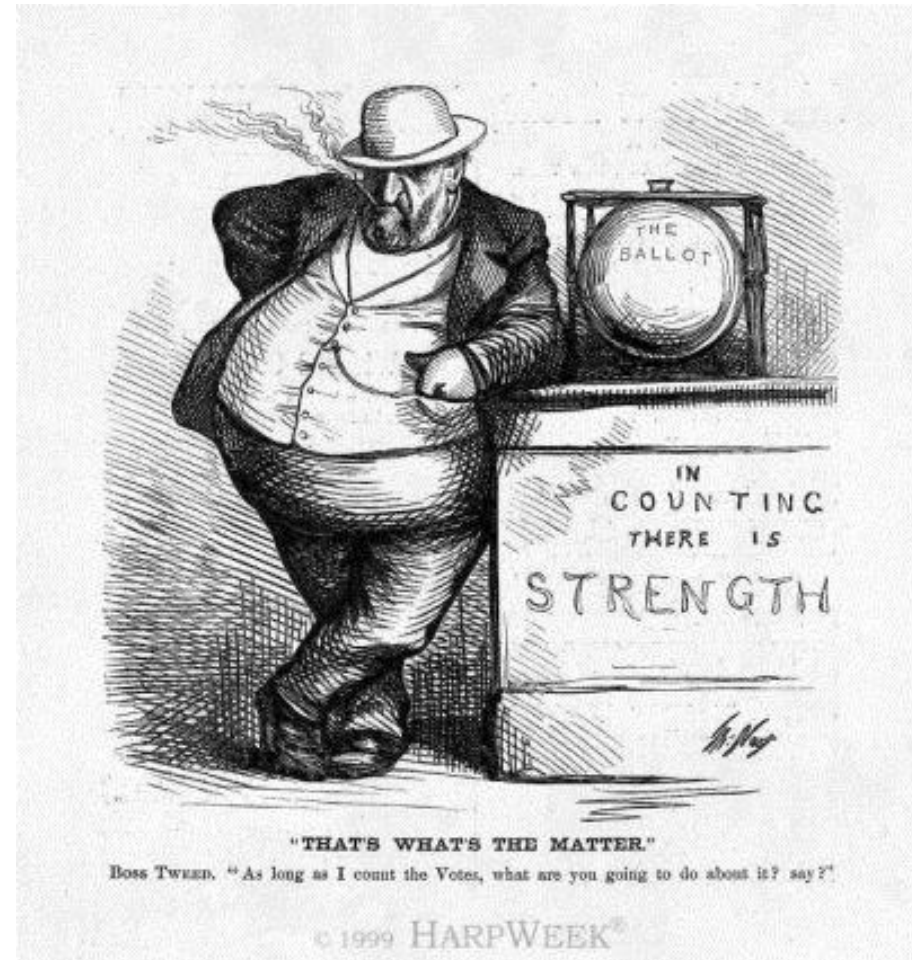
Jacob Riis: *How the Other Half Lives*, a photo-essay.

Jacob Riis was a muckraking journalist who was devoted to improving living conditions for the urban poor, particularly children living in the slums of major Eastern cities. He condemned the owners of saloons and bars for undermining poor families, and felt the poverty, corrupt politics, and a lack of schools and public welfare programs were preventing young immigrant children from having equal opportunity in the United States. Do these children, sleeping outside need a subway grate to stay warm, really have the same opportunities in life as middle class American children?



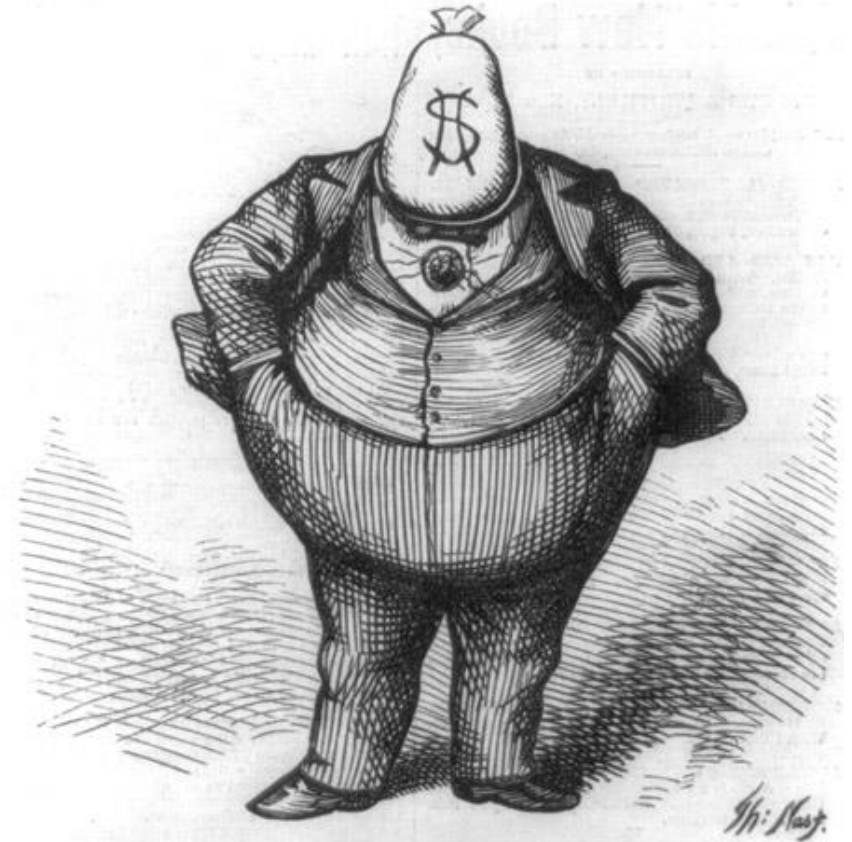
Political Machines: Buying Votes

Political machines were organizations that attempted to buy elections by providing favors for immigrants in poor urban neighborhoods. Once gaining power in major US Cities, they could stay in power for a long time. By providing jobs, food and shelter, or other small favors for immigrants, they could coerce them to vote for their political leaders. How could they afford to provide all of this largess? They accepted bribes and kickbacks from anyone who wanted to do legitimate business in the city – in other words, they stole from the taxpayers. In many areas, political machines stuffed the ballot boxes with votes from immigrants who had left the city many, many years ago. In some cities, the dead cast ballots for decades after they had gone to their final reward!



Boss Tweed: Political Boss

William “Boss” Tweed was the most notorious of political bosses. Representing the Democratic Party of New York City, “Tammany Hall,” Tweed was tied to so much graft, political corruption, and bribery, that eventually he tried to flee the country. Caught up to in Spain, he was brought back to the United States, and imprisoned. Yet, even as he sat in the confines of a narrow jail cell, devoted followers of William “Boss” Tweed sung his praises. They were satisfied that he had tried to help them in their hour of need, even if he had robbed the taxpaying public – which they were a part of! – in order to do it.



THE "BRAINS"

THAT ACHIEVED THE TAMMANY VICTORY AT THE ROCHESTER DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION.

Well, Who Stole the People's Money????

The point of Thomas Nast's very famous political cartoon, "T'was Him!" is that very near everyone involved in local government in New York City was on the take. When each of the well know local politicians in the circle pointed at the person to their right to identify "Who Stole the People's Money?" they were correct! Everyone in the circle stole the people's money. Corruption in local politics was so widespread that the citizens of major cities simply resigned themselves to living with it. Until progressive reformers began to call upon state and federal law enforcement to crack down on local politicians that took advantage of the public trust.

Locally, state and city officials have been accused of similar graft and corruption. Former Governor Bob McDonnell and his wife (convicted in late 2014 and sentenced in January and February of 2015, respectively), Virginia Beach Mayor Will Sessoms, and Councilman John Urrin have all been investigated for corrupt dealings in the past year. On and on....

